



Large folding woodblock map, with stencilled colour.

THE DAWNING OF THE AGE OF BUNKA-BUNSEI

Bunken Edo oezu. [Survey of the districts of Greater Edo].

Author

[DOIN, Ochikochi (i.e. Fujii HANCHI), after]

Publication date

c.1803.

Publisher

Suharaya Mohe,

Publication place

Edo,

Physical description

Large folding woodblock map, with stencilled colour.

Dimensions

1635 by 1965mm (64.25 by 77.25 inches).

Notes

Oriented with west to the top, Suharaya Mohe's large map of greater Edo, now Tokyo (from 1868), has its origins in the city plan of "Ochikochi Doin", actually the surveyor Fujii Hanchi, first issued in 1671, and augmented several times over many years. However, a map with the title 'Bunken Edo oezu', as here, was first issued by Suwara Jiemon, in 1727, also subsequently revised several times until 1778, when the Kanamaru publishing house issued their own map with this same title.

Suharaya Mohē's (1731-1782) revised version is a beautiful and highly detailed map of the city at the heart of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868) empire, at the turn of the nineteenth century, and the dawn of a new era in Japanese culture. Right at the centre of the map, where the Edo Castle should be, is a blank space. Ostensibly for security reasons, this affectation also attempted to add an aura of mystique to the seat of Tokugawa power, and the ruling shogun himself, Ienari (1773-1841). Ienari's administration (1787 to 1837) followed one of great austerity, and this period of his rule became known as the Bunka-Bunsei (Culture - Benevolent Government) period (1804-1829). As is amply reflected in this map, this was a period of increasing urbanisation, which saw the rise of an extravagant merchant class, a proliferation of lavish spending, subsequent financial insecurity, and inevitable corruption. In turn, this would lead to the eventual unravelling of the shogunate's rigid feudal system, and an end to Japan's isolationist policy, which had hitherto limited contact and trade with the outside world.

Nevertheless, the map also reflects the continuing demands of the shogunate's Sankin-kotai policy that required the most powerful lords, the daimyo, to live every other year in Edo, highlighting their residences, other private properties, temples, and marketplaces. The large legend at the left of the map outlines much of this information, as well as adding information on pilgrimage routes, distances from Edo's logistical centre at Nihonbashi (the Japan Bridge), constellations, and lucky and unlucky days.

Bibliography

Provenance

Price: £20000

Inventory reference: 24668